N.A.A.C.P. - 1917

Negroes Discuss Their War-Time Problems

N. Y. GLOBE
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Negro Leaders From All Parts of Country Gather for Seventh Annual Conference—St. Louis Delegate Talks on the Effect of Lynchings.

Midafternoon yesterday, and New York going comfortably, collectedly, unwittingly about its business, while in the armory at Seventh avenue and 132d street, history perhaps was in the making. Several hundred leaders of the colored race, virile types of American citizenship, American manhood and womanhood, foregathered to discuss the advancement of their people. It was the opening of the seventh annual conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The problem before the convention is "The Negro in War Time."

The conference opened under difficulties. Due to the late trains, scarcely more than half the men and women delegates coming from the nort and east and south and west were present when the first reports were read. Miss Mary White Ovington, acting chairman, had something to say of the aims of the society, of the achievements it set for itself, of how far short they fell of their aims, of what they had succeeded in accomplishing. In one city in the south, the society had succeeded after a long struggle in keeping the seventh grade in the Negro primary schools. Jealous taxpayers were seeking to lop it off from the meagre educational bill of fare set for the Negro in the south.

Anti-Lynching Publicity Fund.

The effort of the society to raise a small fund for publicity, especially against the lynching outrages was gone over with all the eager interest of those who had toiled to get together some $11,000 at a time when war and poverty are making demands on the pocketbooks of the people as never before.

The audience moved a little closer to the front of the room, gathering their coats tightly around them as they did so. The hall, like many big places hard to heat in the coal shortage, was chilly. But no one seemed even to notice it. Save for the occasional shrinking into outer garments or turning up of collars, interest in the speakers' words never flagged. The several hundred intelligent, alert faces never swerved from the platform, as one after another the problems that the conference had gathered to discuss were brought out, looked at, and, like some time-old garment, shaken out, tried on, inspected, always with the hope that here and now something could be done to eradicate this or that evil that has hung over the race so long that to onlookers it may seem an inseparable part of the scheme of things, a necessary and indispensable evil.

Negro Publication Gains.

There was a report on the gains of the Negro publication, the Crisis. When a speaker announced a net paid circulation of 50,000 for the opening year of 1918, as compared with the few hundred copies gotten out less than ten years ago, when the publication was started, a murmur of approval, a wave of triumph, and finally a burst of applause passed over the eager little audience.

The field secretary, James Weldon Johnson, told in detail the hardships encountered in establishing branches of the Advancement Association in various cities of the country, and the final result with a generous sprinkling of them through the east and middle west, and from Tampa, Fla., to Toronto, Canada. Again there was the burst of enthusiasm, and several delegates stopped in their busy taking of notes to applaud emphatically.

The discussion of Negro lynching on the programme of the meeting was reached in the late afternoon. At the call for speakers' expression of opinion, a look of hopelessness passed over the face of an old Negro who sat with his head bent on his hands, the light glinting on the gold of his spectacles every time he moved. His whole attitude was expressive of utter despair of ever getting anywhere with the question, wiping out the degradation and the shame and the curse of it.

But in the front row several eager young faces were lifted to watch eagerly what speaker would come forth to open the discussion; the faces of the new generation of supporters of the cause, animated with the light of hope.

Mr. Vashon Speaks for His Race.

"Is Mr. Vashon of St. Louis here with us?" the leader asked. A tall, powerfully built man detached himself from the auditors, taking his place before the people—his people. His face was that of a man of unusual mental power, his eyes keenly alert, two little perpendicular lines of thought deeply impressed on his brow.

"For me there are only two tribunals of justice, the cou rtsestablished by the law of the land and the mob, which appoints itself for the punishment of wrong. And I believe that when a controlling number of the citizens of the country get it into their heads that mob violence does more harm than it does good, creates more crime than it suppresses, mob violence will disappear. Then, and then only." The a udience leaned forward not to miss a word. Under the spell of his sincerity, the audience straightened up and leaned forward. The despairing old man had raised his head, and, chin on his gold-headed cane, was following the speaker with an eager light in his eyes.

Cowardice of Mobs.

"The spirit that animates the crowd, the mob, is cowardice. The men that form it are men who would not dare perpetrate such deeds if they did not have the support of mere numbers of wretched cowards like themselves. And the reason why they are hunting down one man to-day, and thirsting like panthers for his blood, is because that man dared to arm himself and his people against the fury of an armed mob that outnumbered him and his people one to twenty."

Several hundred faces followed each motion of the speaker, each cadence of his pleasing voice, each impassioned utterance for their race, while slowly into their hearts crept the spirit of conviction, the purpose to struggle anew. The speaker rehearsed the murky history that has been the shame of East St. Louis from thirty-three years ago when he went to live in the town, and marvelled that the mayor was quietly killed off for taking an interest in wiping out graft, and the city went quietly on with its work and its play as if nothing had happened. He recited outrages that made his listeners recoil, murmur, almost groan audibly. He discussed plans for righting the wrong, making the country alive to the evil which begets twenty times the evil of itse . And then he ende with a plea for quiet, intelligent meth ods of eradic ing lynching. He ex horted the colored race, his peopl who had suffered these humiliation for one another, to tackle the problen in an unimpassioned spirit of righting wrong, wiping out a national disgrace.

The meeting ended quietly, almost prayerfully. Something about the way in which the colored people gathered to discuss their problems made it seem a privilege to join with them in the stride forward along the progress of safety at home in the United States for the colored citizen.

CONFERENCE DISCUSSES PROGRESS OF THE NEGRO

DECEMBER 23, 1917

REPORTS RECEIVED ON SOUTHERN SCHOOL CONDITIONS.

Moorfield Storey Tells of Advances Made by Race in Past Fifty Years —Mob Violence Denounced.

Miss Mary White Ovington presided at this morning's session of the mid-winter conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, held in the Fifteenth Infantry Armory. Reports on public-school conditions in the South were read, and a discussion was held on how to make the grandfather clause decision effective, and how to better or abolish "Jim Crow" car conditions.

This evening a special performance of "The Servant in the House" will be given for the delegates by the Lafayette Players at the Lafayette Theatre, Seventh Avenue and 132d Street.

Speaking before the conference last night in Ethical Culture Hall, Moorfield Storey, president of the Association, outlined the advances made by the negro in the last fifty years, and spoke of the mob outrages in East St. Louis, Memphis, and other places. He said, in part:

"To-day negroes own land equal in area to New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island combined, some 20,000,000 acres in all. They have other property, worth not less than a billion of dollars. They have 400 newspapers and periodicals; they have banks, insurance companies, factories, stores. There is no business or profession in which they are not represented. They have colleges and schools of national reputation.

THE NEGRO IN THE ARMY.

"The year that has just passed has witnessed much that is most encouraging, and out of the war that is devastating the world has come some good to the negro. To-day black and white alike are drafted, black and white alike hold commissions, and the attempt to keep the negro in menial positions has failed completely. In dealing with this question we owe much to Secretary Baker's courage and sense of justice, and to his manly stand against segregation among citizens who are glad to risk their lives for their country.

"There were some who thought that black and white should serve indiscriminately in the same companies, but I never shared that view. The man who is fighting wishes to be sure that men at his side and behind him are his true comrades, who sympathize with him and believe in him without reserve. Thus, we have Scotch regiments, Irish regiments, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Pennsylvania, and Alabama regiments, put together, because they speak the same language and think the same thoughts. For the same reason, we should have colored regiments and white regiments.

"We all know that if a black does wrong, the fault is laid to his race; if the white man, the fault is laid to the individual. It is all the more important that in this war the representatives of the race should be able to win glory for their race, and not have their victories ascribed to the help of the white men.

"The negro is taxed. Now he has been called on to fight for his country. In the future will it be possible under the unwritten law, or such laws as the grandfather clause, to impose upon the negro the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, and deny to him its privileges? In a word, can we make him welcome to the bullet and deny him the ballot?"

AS TO LYNCHINGS.

In regard to negro lynchings he said:

"Until lynching is recognized as a crime, not only against the victim, but against the State, a treason which shakes the very foundation of free government, this country of ours must rank as among the uncivilized nations of the world. We cannot imagine an English or a French mob burning out a man's eyes with hot irons, as a negro man's were burned out at Dyersburg, and if we picture to ourselves our own horror, if we heard that a woman was burned to death in Trafalgar Square, and the authorities made no attempt to prevent it, nor to punish the offenders, we can guess how we stand before the bar of a civilized public opinion.

"When no public opinion forces the officers of the law to act, when grand juries refuse to indict, juries to convict, and witnesses to testify, the whole community is held guilty of the crime as properly as Germany is condemned for the barbarous atrocities committed by her soldiers."

To-morrow's session will be held at 9:30 o'clock in the morning, and a conference dinner will be held at seven o'clock at the Libya, 149 West 139th Street.

COLORED PEOPLE SEEK BETTER CONDITIONS

NEW HAVEN CONN. EVE REG.
JULY 2, 1917

New Haven yesterday saw the first public meeting of the New Haven branch of the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People. It was attended by a large and enthusiastic audience at Odd Fellows' hall in Goffe street. The meeting was addressed by speakers from the New York office of the association as well as Rev. D. S. Klugh, Rev. Theodore A. Fischer, Judge Livingston W. Cleaveland and Field Secretary James Johnson of the national organization.

The purpose of the organization as enunciated by the speakers, is to readjust the problems and difficulties created by the large influx of colored people from the south. The suppression of the unwritten lynch law in the south was one of the chief problems discussed by the organization yesterday, and needless to say hearty support in correcting this evil was given by all. Better economical and industrial conditions as well as the protection of the civil rights of the negro were other important questions discussed.

The local organization was formed through the efforts of Attorney George W. Crawford for the purpose of helping those who emigrated from the south to

take up their abode in this city. The following were elected as a newly-formed board of directors: Chairman, Rev. C. S. Luther; vice-chairman; Dr. D. S. Klugh; secretary, Fred F. Bonner and treasurer, Livingston W. Cleveland; Dr. O. E. Maurer, Rev. Edward S. Goin, G. W. Crawford and Mary J. Taylor also directors-at-large, Rabbi Louis J. Mann, Dr. L. N. Porter and Mrs. Leo Herz. A total of 135 new members were received into the organization yesterday afternoon. That the New Haven branch will become one of the strongest in the country was the unanimous opinion of all concerned.

GREAT CONFERENCE.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Prof. Pickens Makes a Great Speech.

At the first session of the Annual Spring Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, held at the First Congregational Church last night, Dean William Pickens of Morgan College, Baltimore, one of the principal speakers, in his address on "The Present Attitude of the American Negro," said in part:

"There is no question as to the Negro's patriotism or loyalty. But the mistake is being made by a misinterpretation of the mind of the Negro which is back of this patriotism. The last year or two of the great war have discovered an unprecedented thing, unprecedented except by the spirit of the Negro himself during the Civil War: namely, that America's least privileged and most persecuted class proved to be in a critical time its most dependable citizenship. For several seasons now, every white man in America has been watching every other white man, but nobody has felt the need of watching the American Negro.

"But singularly enough, the people who have been highly favored above the Negro, are the classes who are now deemed worthy of suspicion. Those who have been permitted to buy a house on any corner, who have been admitted to work in any business or industry, who have not been disfranchised but who have been jubilantly naturalized as fresh fuel for the ghost or fetish called 'white civilization,' the people who have not been 'Jim Crowed' or hanged without trial or burned at the stake, (behold ye gods!) these are the people whom the nation watches when the nation's security is threatened. But the Negro, whose ancestry, by the way, was American long before that of the great majority of our white people and whose record of loyal service has been uniform and unvarying, is the only class upon whom all of these abuses have been heaped. And yet, by the reluctant confession of his worst enemies, he is the class of all classes not needing to be watched.

"The anomaly: although the Negro's dependableness is the best attested fact in America today, he is the one man not enthusiastically welcomed in our preparations for war. We wish to get along without him if we possibly can. To be sure we have left the door ajar so that the colored brother can be called, as usual, when sorely needed. Meanwhile some of us are between the devil and the deep blue sea. We must either send the Negro to the glory of the trenches in France, or we must permit him the gain of becoming further intrenched in our home industries and we feel that either trench will have a mighty elevating influence on the American Negro's status.

"He is certainly not loyal to disfranchisement, "Jim Crowism" and lynch law, but he follows the star of America in spite of those evils and with the deliberate intention and fond hope of overthrowing them. In such a situation the Negro must, of course, continually face dilemmas. He has had to be a strike-breaker to get a job, he has had to flee to a separate and inferior school system to escape ignorance, and he has had to dissect the body of Christ in order to enter the church and the kingdom of heaven. In the same spirit he would accept a separate military training camp, that some of his college-trained men might get commissions in the army and serve their country more effectively than as mere "cannon fodder." It is not strange that in the last named delemma the majority of his leaders and friends endorsed the camp idea but it is significant that, while some of his leaders and friends conscientiously opposed it, *all of his worst enemies consistently opposed it.* Those who favored it do not favor discrimination, but they seized that horn of the dilemma which would lend a future advantage to gain a height from which they could deal segregation a heavier blow. His enemies also saw this and opposed it unanimously.

"This explains the frequent appearance of a lack of union among American Negroes. It is plain to an insider. They are perfectly united in aim and ambition, and they differ only in method and policy. This difference is due to their peculiar situation. No other group of people in the round world is brought oftener face to face with a dilemma, where the choice is not between an evil and a good, but between two evils. A choice between evils is a more disintegrating question than any choice between an unmixed evil and a definite good. Which is the lesser evil? This puzzling dilemma is at the bottom of many of the apparent differences among Negro leaders, whose hearts and souls are perfectly united in ambition and aim and object. The only solution of this difficulty is conference, frequent and widely representative conference, a periodic congress of the American Negro. As a matter of group interests, the conclusion of these conferences should be loyally supported and individual opinion submerged. This in the meaning of efficiency. The best prepared agency to take this lead is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

"What will the Negro do in the present war? As a people he will not make profuse professions of loyalty, but he wll stand whole heartedly by the American Union, as he has always stood by it.

In the afternoon the second and last session of the Conference was held at the Colored Y. M. C. A. The subject for discussion was: "The Policy of the American Negro in the Present Crisis," opened by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, editor of The Crisis and Director of Publictaions and Research of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. There was five minute speeches from the floor.

MASS STANDARD
1917

FAIRNESS TO THE NEGRO.

A finely dignified and self-respecting and far-visioned spirit prevails in the seventh annual report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In a straight-away simple fashion is told the story of the earnest effort making through this association to free the Negroes from the handicap of caste prejudice.

The special functions of the association are to fight the attempt at discrimination against the Negro in law-making and group injustices in any form; to secure better educational facilities for the Negroes of the south; and to give publicity as to all phases of the Negro situation.

On this latter point of publicity the association relies for possibly its best work. Indeed, it says that publicity is the main thing. It has found, apparently, what is true of all movements, that the people must know before they can care, and that they come to care in proportion as the general interest grows. To too great an extent the people are unmindful of the life that moves outside their personal circle and of its problems. This report puts it that in nine cases out of ten the world does not realize evil or its significance, and that this is particularly true of the situation of the American Negroes.

The agencies of publicity are at work. The Crisis Magazine, a worthy journal, had a monthly circulation of nine thousand in 1911. The 1916 monthly circulation was 37,625. To more than three hundred newspapers is sent information of movements of significance in connection with the Negro race, and circular letters and other literature is sent out in considerable quantities. Something is doing through a lecture bureau, though only a beginning. The nearly nine thousand members of the association in seventy different branches are all doing their bit in forwarding the movement by keeping its aims before the public.

The crusade against lynching is the great absorbing work of the association, and publicity of all the facts in connection with every case is the great weapon with which it is being waged. An investigator gets upon the field at once and the facts are out, for the public to judge the merits of the case; but especially the effort is made to get the lynchers into court. The ultimate aim is to obtain such legislation in every state as will effectually abolish lynching. A fund of ten thousand dollars was made available last year to carry on this crusade, contributed to about equally by both races, and of this all but a thousand dollars is available for future usefulness. The appeal to the conscience of the white south is steady and the faith is firm in an early strong response.

The association is making itself a clearing house of information as to laws relating to discrimination and the like and is ready to render aid in cases where a colored man or woman has been unjustly treated because of his or her color. The hope is of some day having a sufficient fund available to permit of the maintenance of a regular attorney who shall be ever ready to strike at the "ogre of prejudice"—manifested far too persistently in the frequent attempts to "translate color caste into law."

Still another movement is that which looks to securing federal aid for elementary education for the Negroes of the rural south. The whole Negro problem is so much a national problem and education is so manifestly to be a factor in its solution, that federal aid must come in the reconstruction days that after the war will try to make all things right. A committee on national aid to education is taking the preliminary steps toward launching an organized national movement.

The association looks forward to the days of peace, with the hope that the Negro race may share their advantages. To quote the report: "If America wishes to share in this peace, then it must rid itself of the things that make for war. Of all the causes of war there is nothing like caste and racial prejudice. The hurt that they do to human souls is so great that they make for barbarism not only on the part of the oppressed but on the part of the callous oppressor. Therefore, the real lovers of peace, whether they are fighting or not, should join with this association to do away in America with the wilder and worse manifestations of racial hatred and social caste. In the name, then, of peace, may we not appeal to those who are fighting the world war and remind them that to fight the causes of war is no less a service than actual battle?" Again it says: "There is but one difficulty that silently or articulately must give every American pause. If we bring new freedom to the world, we must bring it with pure hearts and high ideals; yet we all know that right here we have been burning men alive, we have been torturing even the innocent; we have let democratic government die in a third of the land; we have harbored caste. Therefore the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People comes fervently with this call, that America so clear her conscience that she can fight for the world's good with clean hands."

The problem is a great one. It requires intelligence and right-heartedness for its solution.